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SPECIFIC GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS: MINORITIES

Written statement*/ submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[5 February 2001]

*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received in English and French from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Human rights situation in Chechnya

On 25.4.2000 the United Nations Commission on Human Rights adopted Resolution 2000/58 concerning Chechens. In it Russia is condemned for waging war in the northern Caucasus. The Resolution calls on Moscow to investigate and prosecute the human rights violations committed by Russian soldiers and demands that UN human rights experts be given unhindered access to Chechnya. In addition both parties to the conflict are called upon to bring an immediate end to the fighting and the indiscriminate use of force and to establish a political dialogue and meaningful negotiations. To date the Russian government has failed to implement the Resolution's recommendations. Instead the Russian leadership has been responsible for continued grave human rights violations and war crimes.

The Society for Threatened Peoples is calling on the UN Commission on Human Rights to dispatch an independent delegation to investigate human rights violations committed in Chechnya. At the same time a Commission of Inquiry should be set up to establish the facts of the crimes against humanity and the genocide perpetrated by the Russian Army and the Russian government. It is the opinion of the Society for Threatened Peoples and other international human rights organisations and individuals that during the course of this war Russia has repeatedly violated the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The Russian government has deliberately committed acts with intent to destroy a part of the ethnic group of the Chechens and in the course of so doing it has, according to the wording of Article II(a), killed members of the group. Civilian targets such as residential areas, hospitals, schools, refugee convoys and mosques have been subjected to systematic bombardment. The Russian Army has also been responsible for a number of massacres. Arbitrary executions by shooting of individuals and group killings have taken place. According to the wording of Article II(b) of the Genocide Convention, serious bodily or mental harm has been caused to members of the group and, according to the wording of Article II(c) conditions of life have been inflicted on the Chechen people which are of a kind such as to bring about their physical destruction, in whole or in part. According to the permanent Russian representative for Chechnya, Schamil Beno, since October 1999 more than 75,000 houses and at least 74,000 apartments have been destroyed and reconstruction has still not begun. Furthermore, following bomb attacks on Russian apartment blocks, an unparalleled campaign of vilification has been conducted in the official media against the group of the Chechens. The Chechens are called "bandits", "terrorists", "extremists" and "criminals", and in this way the persecution and repression they are subjected to has extended beyond the boundaries of Chechnya into the territory of the Russian Federation. The Society for Threatened Peoples estimates the number of dead among the civilian population at between 20,000 and 40,000. At the same time it should be emphasised that no form of organised uprising could have taken.

In spite of the fact that Russian military officials and politicians have repeatedly announced the end, or at least the impending end, of the war in Chechnya, the bombardments, killings, arbitrary detentions and fighting continue. A network of Russian "control posts" has been established throughout Chechnya at which the civilian population are subject to routine harrassment. For example vehicles carrying sick people are held up while individuals are forced to pay substantial bribes in order to be allowed to continue their journey. In 200 of the 357 population centres out of a total of over 400 that are still inhabited, the Russians want to establish military security posts. So-called "cleansing actions" are still being carried out in the towns and villages, during the course of which civilians are subjected to arbitrary humiliation, arrested and killed and their homes destroyed or looted.

According to Chechen human rights workers in the autumn of 2000 approximately 8,000 detaineees, mainly young men, were still being held in so-called "filtration camps". They have been systematically humiliated, tortured and often left crippled as a result of their treatment there. People living in Chechnya have no rights at all and are defenceless against the arrogance of the Russian soldiers. Russian war crimes and human rights violations have gone unpunished by the Russian authorities.

Approximately 170,000 Chechens are currently living in the refugee camps in Ingushetia. In addition there are an unknown but large number living in camps for internally displaced persons. The humanitarian situation of the refugees gives cause for extreme concern. They lack accommodation, electricity, food, water and medical care. Outbreaks of influenza, tuberculosis and hepatitis have occurred. Humanitarian relief efforts and independent reporting from Chechnya have been severely hindered or made impossible by the Russian authorities, the secret service and the army.

In view of the widespread destruction that has occurred in Chechnya and the extermination or expulsion of sections of the population by the Russian Army, the UN Commission on Human Rights is calling on Russian President Vladimir Putin urgnetly to withdraw the Russian army from Chechnya and allow international relief and development agencies, human rights organisations and international bodies access to the country. Finally the Society for Threatened Peoples also wishes to emphasise that through their obstruction of effective sanctions and cooperation on military and secret service matters the governments of the West must also bear a share of responsibility for the genocide perpetrated against the Chechens.